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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PHNOM PENH 000602

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, INL/AE--CHARLES BOULDIN, AND
OES--ANTOINETTE CONDO AND LYNETTE POULTON
VIENNA FOR SCOTT THOMPSON
BANGKOK FOR ESTH--JIM WALLER, NAS--TERRY DARU, AND
DEA--SCOTT SEELEY-HACKER AND JOHN SWAIN
PACOM FOR JIATF-WEST--DAVE KILBOURN

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [SNAR](#) [SENV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [KCRM](#) [CB](#)
SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR FUNDING FOR METHAMPHETAMINE SUPERLAB
CLEANUP

REF: A. PHNOM PENH 515
[1](#)B. PHNOM PENH 536

[1](#)1. (U) This is an action request for INL and OES. Please
see paragraph 10.

Methamphetamine Superlab Discovered in Cambodia

[1](#)2. (SBU) On April 1, the Cambodian Anti-Drug Police (CADP)
raided a chemical storehouse in Phnom Penh and
amethamphetamine superlab located 80 km south of the city.
The superlab was located on land registered to Chea Chung, a
current or former military colonel, though it is widely
rumored that Chung gave the land to Nhek Bun Chhay, the
leader of FUNCINPEC, the minority party in the ruling
coalition. Approximately 4 tons of chemicals and equipment
capable of completing the first stage in a two-stage
methamphetamine production process were discovered. An
arrest warrant for Chea Chung has been issued, though police
have not yet been able to locate him. The CADP arrested 18
individuals, including one Thai and two Chinese men believed
to be technical experts, 14 male Cambodian laborers, and one
Chinese woman believed to be involved in the production
effort.

[1](#)3. (SBU) A team of Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)
forensic chemists and special agents came to the site April 7
and identified approximately 1,560 liters of thionyl
chloride, 140 liters of diethyl ether, and 700 liters of
acetone. They also found containers indicating a total
quantity of 750 liters of chloroform, though some of this had
already been used. They also identified a trace amount of
pseudoephedrine, 52 kg of processed chloroephedrine and an
additional approximately 30 kg of chloroephedrine that had
not yet been finished processing. DEA and United Nations
Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) staff estimated that if the
chemicals found on site were processed into methamphetamines,
they would yield approximately 55 kg of pure methamphetamine,
which could produce roughly 4.8 million methamphetamine
tablets (worth roughly USD 14.4 million in Phnom Penh or USD
33.6 million in Thailand) or 5 million crystal
methamphetamine (ice) dosage units worth roughly USD 8.5-10.3
million in Thailand, according to DEA and UNODC estimates.

Superlab Presents Critical Environmental, Health Risks

14. (SBU) DEA chemists noted that the chemicals on site are poorly stored and represent a critical environmental and health threat to the area. Thionyl chloride reacts with water, including trace amounts such as humidity in air, to produce two extremely dangerous and corrosive chemicals, sulfur dioxide and hydrochloric acid. Diethyl ether, they noted, is explosive. None of the chemicals at the site are being stored properly, with chemicals sitting outside in intense heat and subject to damage from weather or animals. The DEA team noted that the thionyl chloride has apparently already begun to leak as it is corroding the boxes in which it is stored. The team also reported that, in addition to taking samples from the chemicals on site, they also collected a water sample from a nearby well. It had an oily layer on top, they reported, and did not appear to be potable, indicating likely contamination of groundwater as well. The site is approximately 1 acre and is located in a low intensity agricultural area with the nearest population center about 10 km away.

15. (SBU) Individuals exposed to the chemicals at the site have already reported adverse reactions. Two of the suspects were vomiting blood when arrested. A family of five was hired to tend cattle on the property, and they developed open sores, swollen faces, and hacking coughs as a result of chemical exposure. Even after medical care and several weeks of living in a new location far from the chemicals, one family member still has facial swelling and a rash.

Proposed Clean Up Plans

16. (SBU) The Cambodian government has formed an inter-ministerial committee to develop clean-up plans for the

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site, and UNODC has been designated as the lead international agency for coordinating clean up efforts. Cambodia has no prior experience in handling hazardous waste and there are no companies or other organizations in country who can take on the task. Relying largely on a list of companies recommended by ESTH officers in the region, the UNODC is currently contacting companies that may be able to properly dispose of the chemicals at the site. However, few companies have so far expressed interest. UNODC has so far received only one proposal for site cleanup, from GSM Consultancy in Singapore, a company with a US-affiliate who is certified by the General Services Administration to remediate meth labs in the U.S. UNODC plans to formally issue a request for proposals this week and hopes that clean up activities can begin within three weeks.

17. (SBU) GSM's proposal provides a glimpse at one likely clean up approach. Due to the lack of hazardous waste landfills in Cambodia, the GSM proposal relies on relatively simple technical approaches to disposing of remaining chemicals and contaminated equipment. The preferred option would be to solidify the remaining chemicals with vermiculite, sawdust, or soil; drum the chemicals; and destroy them at a cement kiln south of the site. If this is not possible, given the extremely limited options for disposal, other possibilities for disposal include evaporation and solidification (particularly of chemicals other than thionyl chloride) or mixing the chemicals with cement in a transit mixer. Any cement produced could be crushed and used for a road base or other application. At all points, the chemicals would be segregated to avoid reactions. Contaminated equipment, laboratory glassware, mixing containers, and portions of the structure would be disposed of by performing limited decontamination using water, detergent, and brushes, and cutting or breaking up the equipment.

18. (SBU) To restore the site to agricultural use, soils with high field-measured volatile organic compound (VOC) levels could be remediated in situ by aerating the soil and mixing

it with potassium permanganate (a commonly available supplement to poultry feed) or other locally available oxidizing agent to enhance oxidation. Due to limited information currently available about groundwater contamination, GSM presents several possible scenarios: aerating the water using a bubbler in ponds and cistern to oxidize and volatilize the organic compounds, pumping water through a granulated activated carbon filter to remove contaminants, planting specific species known for removing chemicals from soil, or constructing an oxidation cell for groundwater remediation. The ponds and cistern well on the property could be completely backfilled following the remediation. All work could be done in compliance with a site-specific health and safety plan.

¶9. (SBU) GSM estimates that this approach would likely cost between USD 75,000 and 100,000, although it is difficult to get an accurate assessment given the limited information available. UNODC would like to include a capacity building component into the project so that, in the future, the Cambodian government will be more prepared to tackle these clean ups themselves. This will likely push costs closer to USD 100,000. The German embassy has indicated to UNODC think it is likely that they will be able to contribute USD 50,000 to the clean up effort. No other donors have been identified at this point.

Action Request: USD 50,000 Contribution for Clean Up

¶10. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST: Post requests that INL and/or OES consider funding USD 50,000 towards this clean up effort. Given that the Cambodian Anti-Drug Police are typically involved in small scale busts while there are persistent rumors of police and official involvement in drug smuggling, busting a drug lab connected to a current or former military colonel with ties to the ruling government coalition is a bold and laudable move. While their technical skills and funding are limited, the Cambodian-Anti Drug Police have cooperated very freely with post and the Bangkok-based DEA office. Coming on the heels of a successful visit by national police commissioner Hok Lundy to Washington, Post

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believes that helping to fund the clean up effort would reward the excellent police work and political will which led to this bust, eliminate a very real environmental and health threat, end the possibility of the chemicals being stolen or diverted by other would-be drug producers, and thereby further post's working relationship with Cambodian law enforcement agencies. This relatively small amount of money would also have a dramatic impact in tackling a critical environmental and health issue at a particularly opportune moment when post has previously had insufficient staff and resources to respond adequately to Cambodia's significant environmental needs. Resulting press coverage from US participation in such a high-profile clean up effort would provide a further boost to the US's good reputation in Cambodia. END ACTION REQUEST.

¶11. Point of contact for this request is Polecon officer Jennifer Spande, spandejs@state.gov.
MUSSOMELI